



By Ernest Thompson

WRITE ON GOLDEN POND/ACT ON GOLDEN POND

Those who can't teach teach anyway. That's a line from my play *AX OF LOVE*, inspired, unfortunately, like all good lines, by experience, but I had a few of those teachers along the way and I've worked with more than a few of their students. It's too bad because we actors and writers and directors want so much to give ourselves to the process and are so eager to trust that our creativity and vulnerability are being protected and nurtured that we'll follow anybody home. "You like me, really? I'm sure I meant my work; you like my work?"

I always thought teaching would be something I'd do when I got older, like golf. Then it occurred to me that I'm already older and now is now so now I do these workshops when I can fit them in. I come to it naturally, a father and longtime director, the son of educators, and I've spent four decades in the entertainment business working with some of its brightest stars and I like sharing what I've learned. Teacher still seems like the wrong word for me. Coach fits better, I guess. Facilitator. Coxswain maybe, the loudmouth at the stern of a racing shell, telling everyone else how to stroke. Yeah, that doesn't sound right either. I'm a teacher. My golf game is still on hold.

Write On Golden Pond is a weekend boot camp for screenwriters and playwrights, and I'm hosting two of them this summer - July 17-19 and August 21-23 - at my home, Whitebridge Farm, in New Hampton, NH. An intimate group of brave souls arrive for cocktails Friday evening, thinking, "This doesn't seem all that scary; somebody help me." By the time I've memorized everyone's name - and I'd prefer it if you could all be named Jude - I'll already have seduced the writers into a sort of group therapy around my dining table and nobody gets to go back to his or her B&B or charming hotel on the lake - it's where we filmed *ON GOLDEN POND*; everything's charming - until every writer has a clear idea of what his or her brand new story is, beginning, middle and end, who the characters are and what the arc is.

How can the same crash course cover both screen-writing and play-writing? It's called storytelling; I do them both; I've adapted two of my plays into successful films and the creative process is the same. This isn't a tutorial in camera angles and when to fade out and when to smash cut. I can teach you that, too, but these workshops are about getting your stuff out of the way so you can tell the truth with clarity and humor and courage. When the writers come back to the farm after breakfast Saturday morning, they'll have detailed outlines with them. By lunchtime, they'll have a first draft of their film in process or one-act play. I have a 200 year old farmhouse with lots of rooms and a barn and a bridge to sit on and stone stairs and a labyrinth to walk and trails to hike and swings and benches and 40 acres to get lost in. But I'll find you.

It's a hands-on class. I love helping writers get free of all the excuses we usually rely on to keep us from doing our (best) work and I and my partners, Morgan and Lori Murphy, both gifted writers and actors, and teach-



ers, will be constantly available to provide whatever a writer needs - encouragement, a sandwich, actors to read a scene out loud, a towel, bug spray, a map. By Saturday evening each writer will have a stumble-through reading and notes from me to continue to grow his or her new masterpiece. Whitebridge Farm has been my home for a long time and I've done some of my best work here and you will, too; you'll see when late on Sunday I direct a reading of your script in front of a live audience. Hey, Jude, don't be afraid.

Act On Golden Pond is a one-day picnic August 1st, also at my home. I've been lucky enough to act with and write for and direct some of the lasting legends of our business, the most stellar of whom have been equally comfortable on stage and screen: Henry Fonda, Katharine Hepburn, Jack Lemmon, Julie Andrews, Jeff Daniels; in my movie '1969,' I directed three young actors at the very beginning of their careers - Robert Downey Jr., Keifer Sutherland and Winona Ryder; and I've worked with thousands of actors you've never heard of; and I like to think I was helpful to them all. Being an actor myself, I speak the language; as a writer, I have a good sense of how to parse a scene or monologue; as a director, I've guided actors through enough auditions and rehearsals and shoots to identify what might be in an actor's way and (gently) suggest how to get it out. Act On Golden Pond covers everything I know. It's a celebration of our glorious craft. And everybody gets to work.

The Murphys and I are shaping Whitebridge Farm Productions into a perpetual learning environment. As we put together the pieces for our first movie, *ELYSIAN FARM*, and the web series that we're about to start filming, *TIME AND CHARGES*, we're building courses for young and new filmmakers, writers and actors to participate in the process and learn from a (battle-scarred) veteran as he goes about plying his trade. What's exciting for us as producers is expanding our database of truly talented artists in New England and beyond; you should be part of it.

Visit our website www.WhitebridgeFarmProductions.com to learn more about these and future workshops and who we are. Or call Lori or Morgan at 603 744-3652. Or stop by www.ErnestThompson.us (not com; he's a furniture maker) and you'll find out that I wrote *ON GOLDEN POND* over a weekend. But it was Memorial Day so I had a little extra time.

Ernest Thompson's work has been nominated for a Tony, an Emmy and a British Academy Award. He's won an Oscar, a Golden Globe, a WGA Award, the New England Theatre Conference Major Award, and an Imagineaire.

The group gathers out by the pond on Whitebridge Farm.

Birthing a script in the farm house.

Notes in the barn.

Screenwriting Master Class - Boston Casting.

A new script comes to life with professional actors (left to right) Maureen Keiller, Meagan Hawkes, Lewis Wheeler, and Ken Cheeseman - Screenwriting Master Class, Boston Casting.

All photos are by PT Sullivan.